

POLITICAL HISTORY OF NUPE KINGDOM

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Civil and military officers received no salary. The payment for their services took the form of a share in the booty of slaves, horses, or other property, made in the war by their household troops; of landed property and fiefs bestowed by the king upon his loyal servants; and, finally, of status and exalted social position linked with title and office. Every promotion to a higher rank, as it involved a larger measure of political influence, involved also claims to larger and more lucrative fiefs. 565

The *Ndeji*, 'Father of the Town', is the head of the civil nobility. He is in charge of the affairs of Bida, and all reports or complaints are brought to him first. He is closest to the king, always about his person, the most powerful of all the officers of state because he 'has the king's ear'. He and the other civil rank-holders are the *shawracizi* *nya minin*, the Councillors of the Inner House, so called because they hold their daily *nhó* (council) with the king himself. 565 645

The *ena 'hú*, a creation of the kingdom, has no parallel in the village organization. Service in the war, open to every man in Nupe, nobleman or commoner, is compulsory for this class of professional soldiers. The 'war-ranks' imply tasks for experts, and special responsibility for the execution of these tasks to king and commander of the army. Thus the different titles have specialized meanings: the *Maiyaki* is the General-in-Chief, the *Uban Dawaki* and *Dokoyiringi* are in command of the main body of horsemen, the *Sokyara* is in charge of the mounted vanguard, the *Ejukó* of the archers, the *Sónkali* of the foot-troops, &c. The *ena Maiyaki*, too, holds its daily *nhó*, but not in the presence of the king. They, too, receive reports about the affairs of the town, and also of the country at large; but their main work is the discussion and preparation of military expeditions. 565 701

Only for the four or five highest ranks of the civil and military nobility is the order of precedence really rigid and generally valid. The significance of the remaining ranks changes frequently; bestowed as they are by the king on individuals to whom he owes gratitude or recognition for their services, they may lose their importance under another king, who has other, new men to reward and to distinguish. On pp. 100-1 is a list of the *saraki* ranks which exist in Bida to-day. Where possible I have indicated previous ranks and promotions, and also the first appointment under one or other *Etsu*. 565 554

The *ena manñi* derives its name from the fact that the judicial and religious offices which it comprises are bestowed on Mallams, men of learning and scholarship. Profound knowledge of the Mohammedan literature, which is religious and juridical in one, is the only way to these ranks which are, like all other ranks in the kingdom, bestowed by the king. But the specialized training, the very necessity of finding a man of so special an education, limits the number of possible candidates. With knowledge and scholarship the office is handed on from father to son, political influence and power of certain families do the rest, and the result is that the offices of the *Alkali*, Judge, and *Liman*, Head of the Mohammedan clergy, become hereditary almost more rigidly than served in Patigi. Or again, the highest military rank to-day is called by the Hausa name *Maiyaki*, instead of *Somari*, which is the old Nupe title. 565 555 693 793

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565 the *sarak*i ranks and offices. Thus the present Chief *Alkali* of Bida as
 538 well as his assistant is himself the son of an *Alkali*. The same few families
 693 supply to-day the judges for the district courts in Nupe and indeed for
 793 many courts outside Nupe country, where the reputation of Bida
 scholarship has found recognition. And, as a final result of this tendency
 to make these offices the prerogative of a small group, we find since the
 time of *Etsu* Mohamadu the two offices of *Liman* and *Alkali* combined
 in one person.¹

565 The office of the *Alkali* in Bida, the highest Mohammedan judge of
 557 the kingdom, dates back to the first period of Fulani rule. Its impor-
 693 tance and distinction is expressed in the fact that Mallam Dendo's eldest
 son chose for himself the office not of a temporal ruler but of judge of
 Nupe. Many of the men who held these offices were of great learning and
 outstanding ability. Some have left behind records of the history of

v. Ranks of the Ena Ndeji

Title	Tribal origin	Previous ranks	Biographical remarks
<i>Ndeji</i>	Nupe from Dibo	<i>Magajin Gari</i>	Grandfather was <i>Ndeji</i> , appointed by <i>Etsu</i> Masaba; the father had no title. To-day highest official of the N.A.; head of the Emir's council.
<i>Nyafyeny</i>	Fulani	<i>Magajin Gari</i>	Father and grandfather both <i>Ndeji</i> ; first appointment under Usman Zaki.
<i>Magajin Gari</i>	Nupe	..	Father was <i>Nyafyeny</i> and later <i>Ndeji</i> .
<i>Sonfadakó</i>	"	<i>Gadza</i>	Father had no title; his first appointment was under <i>Etsu</i> Maliki, his second under <i>Etsu</i> Mamadu.
<i>Gadza</i>	No holder at present, but formerly a very important title.		
<i>Sakwa</i>	Fulani	..	Father was <i>Ndeji</i> , titled under Umaru Majigi.
<i>Mamasu</i>	"	..	Father held a lower title; he himself was titled under <i>Etsu</i> Maliki.
<i>Etsu Basa</i>	Benu-Nupe	..	A hereditary title held in one family.
<i>Etsu Gbari</i>	Nupe	..	Father was <i>Uban Dawaki</i> .
<i>Tsada</i>	Fulani	<i>Galadiman Gari</i>	Father and elder brother have held same title.
<i>Ndasu</i>	Hausa	..	Newly introduced title.
<i>Galadiman Gari</i>	Fulani	..	Father was <i>Gadza</i> ; he himself was appointed under <i>Etsu</i> Bello. He became later a 'ward-head' of the modern town-administration.
<i>Kotonkomi</i>	Nupe	..	Father held same title.

¹ There exist two different kinds of *Liman* offices: the *Liman Ratibi*, the minister of the weekday service held in the various mosques of the town, and the *Liman Jemaa*, the minister of the Friday service, which is held in the big city mosque, in the presence of the king. In every part of the town there is a *Liman* of the first kind; but there is only one *Liman Jemaa*. And it is to this highest priestly office that we referred above.

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942

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2. Ranks of the Ena Maiyaki

Title	Tribal origin	Previous ranks	Biographical remarks
<i>Maiyaki</i>	Hausa	<i>Dohoyiringi</i> , <i>Uban Dawaki</i>	Father received title of <i>Maiyaki</i> in the war. To-day official of the N.A.; on the Emir's council.
<i>Uban Dawaki</i>	Nupe	<i>Sokyara</i>	Father <i>Maiyaki</i> and <i>Uban Dawaki</i> . To-day on the Bida town council.
<i>Sokyara</i>	"	<i>Wambayi</i>	Father was <i>Sokyara</i> , <i>Uban Dawaki</i> , and finally <i>Maiyaki</i> . He himself was formerly on the Bida town council.
<i>Dohoyiringi</i>	"	<i>Wambayi</i>	Father was <i>Uban Dawaki</i> and <i>Maiyaki</i> .
<i>Ejukó</i>	"	<i>Tncahoko</i>	Father already <i>Ejukó</i> .
<i>Sondzamisú</i>	"	"	Father had no title; son got his under the late <i>Etsu</i> because of his wealth.
<i>Sonlawu</i>	"	<i>Sarkin Barayi</i>	Father had no title; son received his in the war.
<i>Sarkin Barayi</i>	Hausa	"	Father was <i>Maiyaki</i> .
<i>Tncahoko</i>	Nupe	"	Father was <i>Nagun</i> .
<i>Nagun</i>	"	"	Father was made <i>Nagun</i> in the war.
<i>Sagamawa</i>	Hausa	"	This title is hereditary in one family, followers of the Hausa general and relative (by marriage) of Manko, Handi Boshi.
<i>Wambayi</i>	"	"	Father was a serf (<i>bara</i>) of <i>Etsu</i> Abubakari.
<i>Sanaji</i>	Nupe	"	Held in Bida now instead of the old Nupe title <i>Somasú</i> (the Nupe equivalent of <i>Maiyaki</i>), but is to-day a very small and unimportant title.
<i>Galadiman</i>	<i>Komi-Yoruba</i>	"	
<i>Marú</i>	"	"	Formerly a powerful man; lives to-day on a farm in Trans-Kaduna.
<i>Luci</i>	Nupe	"	
<i>Rwafi</i>	Hausa	"	An hereditary title, held by relatives of the Hausa general of Manko, Handi Bosh.
<i>Sonfaddwa</i>	Nupe	"	Father was <i>Sojetsu</i> .
<i>Borife</i>	"	"	
<i>Sojetsu</i>	"	"	Received title from <i>Etsu</i> Bello; rich landowner.
<i>Mogoyaki</i>	"	"	Received title in the war, under <i>Etsu</i> Maliki.
<i>Songubi</i>	"	"	"
<i>Sónhali</i>	"	"	"
<i>Manlawa</i>	"	"	"
<i>Mamasá</i>	"	"	Father was <i>Sonlawu</i> , a title which he received in the war.

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Nupe. The judicial organization of the kingdom left them free hand to interpret and apply, even to alter and create laws. The names of past *Alkhalai* are known to everybody, and are associated with certain new

565 laws or special judicial practices. Of this aspect of their activity we shall
 554 hear more at a later stage. But one point (already mentioned) must be
 693 stressed here. The office of *Liman* and *Alkali* could become hereditary; many judges and Mohammedan scholars are of Fulani stock; but this reflects only the political influence and partly also the tradition of learning in these families. As representatives of Mohammedan scholarship *Liman* and *Alkali* are only the most exalted exponents of a professional class which comprises men of every status and birth—the Mallams, 'learned men', who are held in high esteem by everyone. Even without rank or title, when of little and insignificant learning, they are placed above the ordinary commoner. They may marry the daughters and sisters of the high-born. The *Etsu* himself, descendant of a Mallam, puts a 'Mallam' before his name. Like his ancestors he honours and receives at his court all Mallams of reputation. They are a class between the classes, a mobile, privileged intelligentsia.

565 The description of the hierarchy of Nupe kingdom is incomplete
 554 without the mention of a last group of minor rank-holders, composed of
 467 the heads of the Bida craft-guilds. The guilds are closed occupational groups, the members of which live together in one locality and practise certain hereditary crafts such as glass-making, brasswork, weaving, &c.¹ The guild-heads receive their titles; together with the usual gift of a turban, from the *Etsu*. Though low down in the scale of ranks, they have yet an official standing, and are raised above the ordinary commoner and peasant. Their headship implies authority over all the members of their craft in town and village. Formerly the guild-heads received a small annual tribute of products of their craft from their fellow craftsmen. Like the members of the nobility, the titled guild-heads are summoned to the *Etsu*'s Council at the *Sallah*, the great Mohammedan festival; and, like the privileged nobility, they are exempted from taxation. Their only tribute takes the form of an annual gift—an *emisa*, or 'salute'—again of products of their craft, the cost of which is borne jointly by the whole guild, and which is presented to the *Etsu* at the *Sallah*.

[651] Certain craft-guilds are linked with the dynastic division of the capital and are divided into three sections each of which resides in a different *ekpā*. The groups of craftsmen also bear more special allegiance to the royal house in whose *ekpā* they live and with the ancestor of which they associate their coming to Bida and the foundation of their guild. But over and above this party allegiance guilds and guild-sections are closely linked with the ruling king of Nupe. For the king and the court represent the most important customers of the Bida craftsmen. All orders which the court intends to place are given through the guild-head, who guarantees their execution and acts as an official 'controller' of his group of craftsmen.

A position similar to that held by the guild-heads is also assigned to the head of the Bida brokers, the *Etsu Dilali*, who again plays the part of an agent of the king in all matters concerning commerce and trade in the capital.

¹ The organization of the Bida craft-guilds will be described in more detail in Chapter xiv.

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like the other inland villages of Nupe, paid a certain annual money tax, assessed per village, which was collected by the *Kuta* and his delegates on behalf of the King of Nupe. The tax which the Kede themselves paid, on the other hand, was of two kinds: first, there was the tax proper, paid locally, at the village to which one belongs. It was an income tax in the modern sense, consisting in a percentage of the money income of every canoe-owner (i.e. profits from trade and transport). Second, there was the *albarka* (lit. 'blessing'), a tribute voluntary but in name, which canoe-owners were expected to pay to the delegates at whose place they were stopping and doing business. The tribute varied in amount: in Jebba it amounted to a 10 per cent., in Muregi to a 20 per cent. duty on all goods bought and sold. Failure to pay meant forfeiting the permission to call and trade in the district. The delegate returned to the *Kuta* half of his revenue from the tax proper, and one-fifth of the revenue from the *albarka*. The *Kuta*, in turn, handed about one-fifth of his total tax revenue (including tax on his private trade and canoe profits) to the *Etsu* in Bida.

Jurisdiction. The modern system provides for a professional Mohammedan judge (*Alkali*), who holds court in Muregi, and to whom all legal cases from the district have to be submitted. Native Administration police assist him on the executive side. The courts in the capital, Bida, are higher courts and courts of appeal for Kede as for all other districts of the Emirate. Under the new system, chief and delegate are allowed no judicial and only a limited executive authority.

In pre-British Nupe the maintenance of law and order devolved in different degree upon all existing political authorities, the local delegate, the Kede chief, and the Emir of Nupe, in accordance with the nature of the offence. The local delegate could only deal with very minor offences of the kind which involves no restitution and only domestic punishment, if any. All other aspects of public security were regarded as being of direct concern to the State—Kede or Nupe. Even the smallest theft came before the *Kuta* in Muregi; adultery, litigation about bride-price or inheritance similarly fell under his jurisdiction. Certain major crimes, on the other hand, were under the jurisdiction of the King of Nupe himself. The list of these 'crimes of the king' (as they are still called) comprises: highway robbery (including robbery on the river

634 highways of the country), homicide, seduction, and the crime *lèse*
674 *majesté* ('abuse of the king', in Nupe phraseology). In securing
693 a criminal, the *Kuta's* own men would act as a police force; if
the crime came under the heading of a 'king's crime' the same
police force would take the prisoner to the capital, where
judgement would then be passed upon him by the king and his
councillors.

634 We can say that with the exception of offences against kinship
693 rules (e.g. the incest taboo) and offences against religious rules—
the various religious rules of the *kintsozi* which were of no concern
to the Kede rulers—no serious breach of established rules of con-
duct was left to private settlement or to the informal sanctions
of 'public opinion'. The comprehensiveness of the claims of the
Kede State to enforce conduct within its boundaries must yet
admit of one significant limitation: the Kede must surrender
jurisdiction over certain major crimes committed in their territory
to their overlords; they must, in other words, agree to a limitation
of their autonomy in the interest of the Emirate at large. We
shall presently encounter another aspect of the maintenance of
'law and order' in which the prerogative of the Kede chief must
give way to that of the central government of the country, yet in
which the relation between the two is, in the very nature of things,
much less clearly defined: the territorial rights of the various
subject groups which are united under Nupe rule.

634 *Territorial Rights.* The Kede, as the overlords of the *kintsozi*,
423 guarantee to their own subject groups certain corporate territorial
rights. The semi-riverain *kintsozi*, as we have seen, derive their
livelihood to a large extent from fishing in the backwaters and
creeks of the River Niger. The fishing rights of the different *kint-*
sozi villages were upheld by the Kede rulers and enforced if need
arose by the full military power at their disposal. Nupe kingdom
equally guaranteed corporate territorial rights to its various
subject groups. The Kede, as one of these subject groups, enjoyed
these territorial rights with respect to their undisturbed possession
of the whole riverain area.

634 But the presence of a strong and expanding group like the Kede
423 in the political framework of the Nupe State must invite conflicts
578 over the territorial rights of other subject groups of Nupe which
are neighbours of the Kede in the river area. As the more recent
history of Nupe shows, conflicts of this kind have frequently

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173 the supremacy of Idah, and established the independent Nupe kingdom which is eventually to become one of the most powerful native states in Nigeria.²

II.

778 The chain is the sacred relic of all *ledu* villages. It protects the village from sickness, and gives fertility to the women. But it has yet another, more special, meaning. It is also called *ti dzana*,
695 the 'head of Daana,' and the story goes that Tsoede inaugurated the chain by beheading his own maternal uncle, Daana, and placing head and chain together on the wooden tray as a permanent
696 symbol for his power over life and death. From that day the chain remained an instrument of execution, and the villages which possess it are the ones to perform the execution; they are the 'king's hangmen.'³ The jurisdiction over grave crimes lay in the hands of the king. They were actually termed *leifi nyé 'tau*, 'crimes of the king.' But whenever such a grave crime was committed, the king had to summon the help of the *ledu*. The criminal was brought to the king's residence first. The king would then try the case, invoke the sacred ordeal, and pass the sentence. Then his own men would bring the criminal to the place of the execution, as a rule the *ledu* village situated nearest to the place of the crime. There men from the village put the criminal in irons, and led him into the bush where nobody could see him, tied the sacred chain round his neck, and strangled him. Finally they buried the corpse in the bush, and returned to their village, announcing to the king's messenger that 'everything had been done.'

681 The crimes which were regarded as such 'king's crimes' were: theft during the night, and big theft (e.g., of cattle, or a horse); murder; and the crime of *lése majesté*. In this case the *ledu* did not kill the criminal, but only flogged him severely, and drove him out of the territory of Nupe. In case the criminal was a man of high rank, perhaps of the ruling family, only the head towns, Jebba or Tada, could perform the execution.

693 Three men were the executioners in every village, and one amongst them was invariably the *adace*, the 'father of the shooting,' i.e., the head of the hunter guild. There is a deep meaning in this. For a hunter is not only a man trained in hunting and killing, but he also possesses that essential magic which, after the act of killing, can expiate the deed, and propitiate the spirit of the dead. And through this element of propitiatory magic the killing of the guilty criminal is distinguished from all other killing. It ceases to be mere inflicting of death. It gains the dignity of a sacred office, and an almost ritual act.

693 Whether such beliefs went deeper than this: whether there existed a general superstition which made the people shrink from the idea of inflicting death on natives of their own village, and thus made them entrust this uncanny work to people from other places, or to people protected by special magic, I dare not decide. There certainly exists still to-day a strong repugnance against
767 having to do with all matters concerning death, and in particular unnatural death. Even the
[761] ordinary burial is carried out in secret, by one special family in every village which alone possesses the magical knowledge of burying the dead. But should a person be killed by lightning, or found murdered, no native of the village would come near the dead, but people from another village (or perhaps a village known for its special magic) would be called to perform this mysteriously perilous
693 work. Yet, on the other hand, I have positive evidence that in certain places of Nupe, outside the

[74] ² A few words only about the possible historical basis of this tradition. According to the existing, very detailed, genealogies of the Nupe kings, Tsoede's life fell into the beginning of the sixteenth century. At that time Idah is said to have been, since long, under the supremacy of Benin. Now the big bronze figures at Jebba and Tada are cast in *cire perdue*, the same technique as the famous Benin bronzes—and a technique which does not exist, at least not in the same perfection, in Nupe country to-day. The chains and irons, finally, are evidently of European origin. They must have been brought into Nigeria by the Portuguese who, as we know, had established close contact, and

an extended slave trade, with the king of Benin by the end of the fifteenth century. From Benin the bronze figures and chains might have reached Idah, and eventually Nupe, by the natural highway for trade and traffic, the Niger.—About the bronze figures see also MAN, 1931, 261, and 1934, 193.

³ The *ledu* are also known by the name *dogari nya Tsoede*, lit. the policemen of Tsoede. *Dogari*, however, is a Hausa word, which might have been adopted more recently. In one or two places I actually found an older term still remembered: *lete-cigbeci*: lit. the executioner-medicineman. This term evidently refers to the magical element connected with this office.

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sphere of influence of the *ledu*-organization, death penalty was executed, though in secrecy, by the people of the village themselves. But however this be, the actual issue is little affected. For even if there had existed this strong superstitious belief, the problem for us here is that it should be made use of in such a special way. The belief, the sentiments expressed in the belief, and the political institution in which they crystallise, are two entirely different things. The political system of Nupe kingdom, creating the *ledu*-organization, might actually only have adopted existing motives and ideas; but then it lent its own most sacred symbolism to their support, and at the same time formed out of their psychological appeal a rigid judicial monopoly, and a political office which almost comes to deny its origin: for the office of the *ledu* includes as we have seen also cases which have nothing more to do with death, namely the flogging of those who abused the name of the king; and ordinary flogging was done in every Nupe village.

III.

More than a hundred years of Mohammedan law, decades of civil war and political changes, were not powerful enough to break the spiritual influence of the *ledu* institution, the belief in its oracles, and the sacredness of its office. But they have been able to obliterate certain details of its organization. One point in particular it is difficult to ascertain to-day: who was actually entitled to make use of the organization of 'Tsoede's hangmen'?

I found two different, and conflicting, interpretations. According to the first, the power of the *ledu* was limited to the river, and the authority over the *ledu* was, from Tsoede's time almost up till now, given into the hands of the chief of one section among the Nupe, the Kyedya. The people who call themselves Kyedya are the most powerful among the riverain Nupe. They are the canoe- and fishermen on the main river; they monopolize river traffic and trade, they look down upon their neighbours, and style themselves the 'Lords of the Waters.' They are united in a very strongly centralized political organization, and their head is the chief of Muregi, who holds the ancient hereditary title of *kusa*. The *kusa*, then, is said to be the legitimate head of the *ledu* organization. But a second version says that the office of the *ledu* comprised the whole country (or at least stretched inland as well), and that the power over the *ledu* belonged exclusively to the *etsu*, or kings, of the Nupe—the kings who were till the Fulani conquest the direct descendants of Tsoede.

Weighing evidence against evidence, the situation seems to be this:—Originally an organization of the Nupe king the *ledu* system was adopted later by the Kyedya. In the beginning the Nupe king alone was entitled to act through the *ledu* organization. Geographical and historical facts, reflected in the mythology of their ancestor-king, account for the connection with the river area: the territory of the young Nupe kingdom were the river banks. The river Niger, *adduma*, as the Nupe call it, 'Father Niger,' marks the path of the mythical Tsoede where he set out to unite the Nupe into a powerful kingdom. Even later, in historical times, when the Nupe state extended far across central Nigeria, the capitals always remained near the river: Gbara, Jima, Mokwa and Raba.⁴ But also economically the Niger was the life centre of the country. The welfare of a large section of the population depended on the river. And traffic and trade, so immensely important in Nupe culture, were bound up with the Niger. What appears, then, in the context of myth as the path of the ancestor-king of Nupe, plays in the actual tribal life the rôle of a 'King's Highway,' of a vital artery of the political and economic organism over which the king extends his own special, sacred authority. Violation of the law in this area means the violation of this sacredness; and crimes committed here became crimes of a special sort, subject to a special jurisdiction which has the meaning more of a sacred vengeance than of an ordinary punishment.

When, however, during the Fulani wars the political centre moved away from the river, finally to Bida, the present capital of Nupe, the original organization of the *ledu* must have lost force and significance. And then it was, as our evidence points out, that the Kyedya claimed the title over the *ledu*. The power over the river was now theirs, unquestioned. The Kyedya, hostile to the Fulani invaders, always boasting with their ancient lordship over the waters, and regarding themselves still in the days of British rule as equal to the king of Bida, seized this organization which seemed a

⁴ See the map in my article on Nupe State and Community (AFRICA, VIII, 3).

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631 weapon so well suited to their hands. And in their small 'state within the state' this jurisdiction
693 over the 'King's Highway' was still working, a true if smaller copy of the old system, some thirty
or forty years ago.

IV.

681 The *ledu* villages are, as we have seen, linked with the king's person by special sacred links;
693 they are made to share the king's guardianship over the law; they thus visibly represent, and almost
642 propagate, the supreme power of the king at what we are tempted to call 'strategic' places. And
in this, it seems to me, an important general sociological issue is involved. Strict centralization
of legal power, however strong a machinery for political integration it seems, always harbours a
disintegrative element as well. For it tends to separate the crime as actually committed from the
final act of justice. The element of retaliation and atonement, so essential to the savage mind,
becomes meaningless where the criminal is tried and punished a hundred miles away, and
by people who are, practically, strangers. The individual community is deprived of one of the most
powerful elements of social cohesion, namely, the title to sanction the violation of its laws and of its
social order within its own boundaries. It appears to be the meaning of the *ledu* organization to
neutralize this influence for that vital area of the Niger valley. For the most conspicuous, final,
phase of jurisdiction is returned to a certain extent to the individual community. It is true
this applies only to a few selected places. But we remember their surprising regular distribution
on the river; and also the rule that the *ledu* village nearest to the place of the crime had to be called
upon to perform the execution. These villages are 'representative' places, and 'strategic' places,
and their selection is backed by the strongest charter: mythical and religious belief.

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